clear instance of the nostalgic (and objectively false) concept of the past that motivated the literary ideology of some key figures among the New Critics. In the context of the present argument, it is pertinent to recall Warren's suggestion (ultimately rejected) for the volume's title: "Tracts Against Communism."

10 Paul de Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity," in *Blindness and Insight*, p. 165.

Composition: Inscribing the Field

Paul Kameen

> These lectures are an attempt to revive an old subject. I need spend no time, I think, in describing the present state of Rhetoric. Today it is the dreariest and least profitable part of the waste that the unfortunate travel through in Freshman English! So low has Rhetoric sunk that we would do better just to dismiss it to Limbo than to trouble ourselves with it—unless we can find reason for believing that it can become a study that will minister successfully to important needs.
>
> I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric.*

Thus I. A. Richards, in the winter of 1936, both posed the material problem and inscribed the intellectual context for his series of lectures, at Bryn Mawr College, on *The Philosophy of Rhetoric.*[1] His project is clearly an ambitious one: to transform "the dreariest and least profitable part" of the English curriculum into a "study that will minister successfully to important needs." In the process, Richards both resuscitated the long necrotic "field" of Rhetoric and helped to focus the then emerging "science" of communication theory,[2] a tandem that has interacted in peculiar ways over the last fifty years to produce an intriguingly contradictory array of academic enterprises; among them,

when these two forces find their locus of confluence in departments, especially English departments, that see the teaching of writing as central to their mission, is the "discipline" of composition. Let me withhold, for the moment, any poking and probing at the meaning and significance, in theory and practice, of the word "discipline" as it applies to this hybrid of Rhetoric/communication. Let me begin instead with the implicit assumptions in this passage from Richards, from his prospect at the outset, long before the Augean stables he helped to erect were put fully into use. Richards, in the final sentence of this, his first paragraph, has proposed his alternatives: He can either "dismiss" his infant subject to "Limbo" or he can baptize it and send it off, on its own, toward a destiny for which only it can be held accountable. Clearly, the "unless" tells us, Limbo it shall not be. And this "unless" makes the difference between the shortest lecture series on record and what I believe to be the seminal argument for the institutionalization of an academic apparatus that today extends, via both introductory and advanced courses in composition and a variety of versions of Writing Across the Curriculum, throughout the academy.

It is telling, I think, that what Richards wants to do, proposes to do, is "find reason for believing" that Rhetoric "can become. . . ." Not to explain, to justify, to add to, but, in effect, to start over, to create the ground for the possibility of "belief" in this new "study." He sees the failure of Rhetoric historically, from Aristotle to Whately, as more a failure of conviction than of vision, more a fracture in the execution of the enterprise than an inability to produce a body of disciplinary texts/discourse, or, perhaps most accurately, as a kind of broken promise that, with the proper combination and implementation of the intellectual instruments available to the modern academic, can finally be kept. His hope, then, is to invent a "new" Rhetoric, an "improved" Rhetoric, a "study" to "minister successfully to important needs."

Almost every word here reverberates with significances, significances that have been expressed and enacted in all of their wide variety in the "discipline" that has grown up around them. "Minister," for example, suggests both the redemptive and the prophylactic ambitions of the mission to provide "remedies" for misunderstanding, to create a "study which can prevent and remove them." And to do it "successfully"—not just to attempt such a cure, to promise one, to perform a lot of witchdoctorly mumbo jumbo over the ailing subject, but to make it work and make it stick, to provide a "measure with which to calculate" both the problem and, thereby, the degree to which any activity helps to solve it. "Success" for Richards is not merely a matter of opinion or faith, though this latter would of course be crucial to the ministerial aspect of the mission; it is or is not estimable, demonstrable, or should be. And thus composition studies have become both a missionary enterprise on behalf of general literacy and a "scientific," research-based "discipline." Perhaps nowhere in Richards's *oeuvre* is this paradoxical, almost-but-not-quite self-contradictory nature of rhetorical studies more cogently poised than in this single phrase. It is, in fact, a peculiar stress throughout his work: the competition between "meaning" and "measurement," between a conception of langauge-as-metaphor that resists, by its very nature, any accounting in scientific terms and a powerful urge to demonstrably account for that.[3] In Richards, of course, there is both the will and the skill to keep that fissure from opening too widely and engulfing him completely. The development of rhetoric/composition after Richards is not so synthetic. For one of the discernable trends is a gradual drift, in opposite directions, from the point on this path that Richards occupies, in alliance, on the one hand, with positivism, cognitive psychology and structural linguistics; on the other, with phenomenology, depth psychology, and poetics. The former of these represents the ever-present "soft science" side of composition theory, its ground in and preoccupation with data-based research and the technology of text production. The most recent expression of this trend is, of course, the "process" approach to teaching composing, which has been dominant in the field for the last 5-7 years. The latter alliance is represented by a preoccupation with the literary/philosophical aspects of the production of "meaning"—metaphor, fictionality, perception, etc.—and has been gaining prominence more lately in the journals and textbooks.

But more about all of that later. Let me return again to the excerpt from Richards, to the phrase "important needs." "Important," on a surface level, speaks for itself; on a deeper level, it suggests the contours of his ultimate "hope" that "Rhetoric may, while exposing the causes and modes of the misinterpretation of words, also throw light upon and suggest a remedial discipline for deeper and more grievous disorders . . . which disturb the development of our personalities," allows him in fact to posit a fundamental connection between "tactful and discerning reading" and "happy living":[4] "The general form of the interpretive process is the same, with a small-scale instance—the right understanding of a figure of speech—or with a large scale instance—the conduct of a friendship" (*PR*, p. 136). Richards is concerned then with far more than just the conventions and proprieties of personal or professional discourse; the psychological and social implications of discourse are clearly ethical, moral, related to right and wrong, and he wants to found a study that, ultimately, will help us to avoid "large scale disasters" (*PR*, p. 137) by allowing us to differentiate "good communication" from "bad"; which leads us, finally, to "needs"—the inescapable psycho-social significance of the enterprise, circling neatly, along a different disciplinary angle, back to "minister."

In this rich and heavy loam, the modern science of rhetoric and the discipline of composition have taken root and grown, awkwardly, in strange places, spottily at first, then, more recently, quite aggressively, almost spectacularly, threatening from some points of view to overrun the entire garden of the college curriculum. Which is not to say, of course, that "Freshmen English" is necessarily any less dreary, any more profitable in all cases than it was in Richards's time. Only that composition, and more increasingly Rhetoric, is a vast and powerful enterprise at most contemporary colleges and universities, a primary, and more and more often a required, part of every freshman's curriculum. Tracing the path(s) from Richards's first paragraph to the present "state of the art" in composition theory/practice is a patently

intractable problem. I will not even attempt such an inquiry in systematically historical terms. But sketching out several of the developmental schema that have provided structure to the growth of this organism is, to a certain degree, both possible and useful. I will deal with several such schema, in a fragmentary manner, in the hope that their aggregate will suggest the contours of the "study," the "field" that Richards helped to propagate.

Let me turn to the concept, the metaphor, of the "field" itself and follow where it leads, which is a long way back, to Socrates, who posed the question cloyingly, temptingly, to Gorgias, trying to pick his fight with this most formidable sophist. "What," he asks, "is the field of this science (i.e., rhetoric)?"[5] What follows is one of the most contentious and ill-resolved of all of Plato's dialogues. And despite the number of times that versions of the same question have been asked in the meantime, Socrates' query remains as pertinent today, and as problematic, as it was then. What is, in fact, the "field" of rhetoric? Clearly it is a part of the academic repertoire that has accrued a disciplinary status, claimed a territory of issues, methods, courses, texts, a turf that may fall under the domain of any number of departments and programs in the contemporary academy—speech, communications, humanities, education, and, especially in the case of my inquiry here, English. But this does not in any manner address the intent, the challenge, of Socrates' question. To define "rhetoric" in such a manner is to advance little, if at all, from Gorgias's position, and though he cannot be said to "lose" his debate with Socrates, neither does he, nor can he, "win" it. At the end of the dialogue, the question remains, explored but unresolved. Such seems to be the chronic fate of all of our rhetoric about rhetoric.

Socrates' position, though, is fairly clear from the outset. Rhetoric is not, at least as it is represented by Gorgias and his sophist cronies, any "field" at all—not in the ways that medicine and music are, for these arts/sciences have their own "subject matters," the knowledge and purposes of which the discourse they employ is about. Rhetoric, on the other hand, has no such "subject matter" other than "words" through which the rhetorician seeks to effect in his listeners not "knowledge" but "belief," or, more precisely, it is the art of "producing belief without knowledge." Such an enterprise is, of course, both trivial and intolerable to Socrates. And he relegates it to the status of a "routine" or set of "routines," like "cookery" an array of transferrable recipes for concocting pleasant tasting and attractive dishes, useful when kept in its place, but hardly "important" enough to earn the status of a "field."

Let me explore a little further the implications and significances of this metaphor of the "field"—not so much because it is what Socrates said or meant, precisely, at the outset of his argument with Gorgias, but because it allows us to enter into what I believe to have been, and to be today, the primary problem with trying to define rhetoric and composition within the traditional formats for inscribing "disciplines" in the academy.[6] In Socrates' terms this amounts to a distinction between an organized body of discourse about something

other than discourse and an organized body of "knacks" about discourse about anything at all.

The metaphor of the "field" is aptly paradoxical, for it can refer both to a place that is defined by its own intrinsic character—by the "things" that reside or are cultivated there—or to a place that assumes its particular identity only through the one of many possible activities that happens to be occurring there at the moment. In the former case we have a kind of naturally bounded, geographically unique "place" that can differentiate itself from, and coexist with, any number of other such "places"; in the latter case we have an arbitrarily located "space" wherein any number of events can ensue, an "arena" capable of hosting whatever "games" we choose to "play" there. The former is defined by, achieves its identity through, accomplishes its purposes with, its "content"; the latter is defined by, achieves its identity through, accomplishes its purposes with, its contentlessness. And, because of its peculiar nature, rhetoric/composition has always struggled, shifted back and forth, between these two structural possibilities. Socrates, of course, sees the sophistic rhetoric of his time as too much of the "empty space" approach to the study and implementation of discourse and he seems set on supplanting it with his own version of the dialectic, which is a far more content-dependent mode of argumentation.[7] Gorgias makes stab after stab at countering Socrates, but he makes his case badly.[8] This becomes especially clear when we look forward to Aristotle's *Rhetoric,* where he can be said to answer Socrates' question without even posing it. For it is, in Aristotle's scheme, precisely the very "contentlessness" of rhetoric that situates it in a relationship of power toward "the rest of the arts and sciences." It is Rhetoric, alone among the arts ("save Dialectic") that has access to, can critique, analyze, evaluate, describe all of the other "fields" that constitute the academy. Nothing itself, it is, in effect, master/servant to all.[9]

Thus, precisely what Socrates most objects to about the field of rhetoric, Aristotle turns, in a positive way, into its very identity, what distinguishes it, in radically structural ways, from all of the other "arts and sciences" (save, of course, Dialectic, Rhetoric's dynamic counterpart). For all of these others are merely "instructive and persuasive with regard to some special subject-matter. . . . But Rhetoric, it would seem, has the function of discovering the means of persuasion for every case, so to speak, that is offered; and hence we say that the art as such has no special application to any distinct class of subjects."[10] Rhetoric, then, has, by definition, no "definite subject matter" of its own, no specific "field" to which it is confined, no essential "content" that defines its disciplinary expertise, as do medicine and geometry and the rest of the arts and sciences. What it does have, via this definition, is a privileged access to the modes of argumentation, the discourses, of all the other disciplines. It is, in effect, meta-disciplinary by its very nature, susceptible either to servitude or dominance or some combination of the two, depending on circumstances, in relation to the other disciplinary constituents of the academy.

It is possible now, I think, to begin to see the structural problem that arises when one seeks to ascribe a disciplinary status to

rhetoric/composition studies in the contemporary curriculum. As a "field" it has no content, no subject matter of its own, as does history or physics or "the rest of the arts and sciences." It is, therefore, still vulnerable to Socrates' critique—at best a helpful set of recipes and techniques for succeeding in the academy or in business, at worst a trivial, vacuous and dangerous fraud, unworthy of inclusion in the pantheon of the other disciplinary "fields." But, ironically, it is this very flaw in its character, this capacity to constitute itself as the arena for discourse about discourse, that is the source of its power, its capacity to spread to any corner, or all across, the curriculum. It matters not, from an Aristotelian point of view, upon what turf/ground/territory rhetoric situates itself; it can pitch its tent, build its arena, inscribe its "field" almost anywhere. It matters only that it finds a vantage point from which it can view the various "games" that the rest of the arts and sciences play, the structures of which are its interest and its business to measure and appreciate.

And the most prominent vantage point lately has been located in the "field" of English under the general rubric of "composition." Richards himself seems to accept that condition unquestioningly when he ascribes the study of Rhetoric to "Freshman English." With few exceptions though, at the time Richards wrote his lectures, and for perhaps twenty-five years thereafter, composition *was* merely the dreary, barely tolerated stepchild of traditionally structured programs in English (literary) studies. That this activity/responsibility was engaged at all by most such departments was probably more a matter of historical habit—both grammar and *belles-lettres* happened for a variety of reasons to have been assigned to the territory of English studies—and of the general cultural ambition in American education toward democratization, with "literacy" perceived as its essential political instrument. This begins to explain the pressure on the academy to teach students "how to read and write," and it indicates where that charge was most likely to be enacted. What it does not account for—though it suggests a direction in the contrast between grammar and *belles-lettres*—is the fact that the formats employed to discharge the general responsibility to literacy have tended to isolate reading from writing, with the latter relegated/delegated to "composition" programs, invariably at the freshman level, and the former appropriated by more advanced programs in "literature."

Once again I think we need to go a long way back to understand this peculiar compartmentalization of the curriculum in English—and the status of composition in that framework; as far back as Aristotle, who chose to write separate treatises on the art of "invention"—his *Rhetoric*—and the art of "interpretation"—his *Poetics*. The mere fact that these most seminal documents exist between separate covers has, I believe, contributed to the paradigmatic separation of studies in composition and literature, in writing and reading, the former in each case being affiliated with practical, public, implicitly politico-economic literacy, the latter with critical, private, aesthetic literacy. This Aristotelian bifurcation of the production of discourse is, I think, the prototype—and his treatises the ur-texts—for a similar bifurcation of

the contemporary English curriculum. Richards himself followed a comparable pattern in distinguishing his *Philosophy of Rhetoric* from his *Practical Criticism,* the latter of which had its own powerful effect on the English curriculum.[11] Despite, though, the obvious theoretical problems with such a separation, it may well have functioned as a workable division of labor in the discipline—but for the fact that Rhetoric had, since the Renaissance, gradually atrophied into little more than congeries of "grammars," taxonomies of the proprieties of public discourse. Thus, the American academy, with no intellectual tradition of its own for the dynamics of public/political discourse, enacted a functional definition of composition as little more than the correct imitation of "model" texts. Such an approach was perhaps inevitable, given the fact that most composition teachers were, until quite recently, trained for, and most interested in, literary scholarship. And during the 1950s—when composition programs began to multiply and expand in response to the post-war demand for higher education, when, as a consequence, the "mix" of the student population shifted toward the middle and working classes—the dominant critical modes were formalistic in nature, serving via their own internal influences merely to aggravate the already structural tendency to oppose literature and composition, reading and writing.

It is only a short step from here to the most obvious symptoms of those institutional tendencies—the handbook/reader tandems that were commonplace in composition instruction during the fifties; and a short step also toward the pedagogy of imitation and correctness that such textbooks foster. The act of reading in such a framework becomes merely the struggle to assimilate the "style" of a proposed "model," and the act of writing becomes the inverse process of replication. The handbook of course functions as the check against taking, in the process, untoward liberties with the customary proprieties of academic/literary discourse; and in some cases it became the dominant instrument of instruction/oppression for both student and teacher. One can see, I think, how a relatively long tradition of such a padagogy would constitute "Freshman English" as "the dreariest and least profitable" of enterprises, not only for the students who were compelled to take such courses, but also for the faculty who were compelled to teach them.

It is difficult, of course, to verify, to precisely locate, such attitudinal biases, to "calculate" the ways in which they have contributed to the current identity and status of composition. But few would argue with the claim that composition has been, and is, generally perceived to be at the bottom, or near it, of the hierarchy of status in the English curriculum. I believe that the structure of that hierarchy was forged in the crucible I have just described, on the basis of historical pressures and accidents, of intellectual trends and habits, of personal choices and judgments, all of which both reflected and served to reify the long term "class structure" and division of labor in the discipline.

With the institutionalization of that relationship of privilege between reading and (versus) writing, composition was effectively

dissociated from both its "natural" scholarly tradition—which is outside of English studies—and from the "natural" scholarly tradition of the disciplinary territory it happened to inhabit. Competition for "turf" became inevitable; and competition, despite the more and more numerous gestures toward conciliation, is today what we have still.

The nature of this competition is, of course, mutual—on the one hand a continued, and what I would characterize as an "elitist," avoidance of and, often, contempt for, the enterprise of composition from traditional humanist literary scholars and teachers; on the other, an aggressive development in composition of a disciplinary organon—scholarship, theory, research, courses, programs, "turf," all toward the end of achieving credibility, legitimacy, and "identity" for those who for whatever reason (and it is more and more often by choice) see themselves primarily as teachers and scholars of "composition" rather than "literature."

This struggle for status, for relative power in the discipline, has transformed "composition"—despite the fact that it remains stigmatized by its association with "remediation," despite the fact that it is still both perceived and operated as the cheap-labor training ground for graduate assistants, part-time instructors and junior faculty—into a force to be contended with, both in the arena of English studies and in the academy generally. And this desire for upward mobility also begins to explain the peculiar alliances that composition/rhetoric has forged among other, more amenable, departments and disciplines in the university—with, for example, psychology, linguistics, speech, philosophy, education—creating a wide variety of local hybrids to enact the charge to teach our students how to write.

Composition is then a relatively infant study, seeking still to define the boundaries of a "field" sustained by its own research, scholarship, faculty, academic unit, and particularly by its own textbooks. For it is, ultimately, the constellation of a discipline's teaching instruments that expresses both its intrinsic identity and its public image.[12]

There have been, by my best reckoning through the many composition textbooks that have been popular over the last thirty years, four primary "approaches" to the teaching of writing at the university level and they have developed, generally, in sequence, each one holding sway for five to ten years, each one preparing both the need and the ground for its successor. They can best be distinguished from one another by the epistemological premises that govern their implicit definitions of the nature and purposes of discourse, i.e., by the largely unexamined assumptions that constitute their philosophical undergirdings. These approaches are, in generational order, grounded (1) in the realm of forms, with particular emphasis on the traditional "modes of thought" that organize knowledge and discourse; (2) in the inner precincts of the "self," with particular emphasis on experiential narration and the personal "voice"; (3) in the external domain of "audience," with particular emphasis on "information-" and "process-based" conceptions of the production of texts; and (4) in the arena of "method," with particular emphasis on the fundamental relationship between language and perception, reading and writing.[13]

Each of these approaches is, of course, constituted by its own array of assumptions and each thereby constitutes its own "universe of discourse" about discourse. Among the shaping forces are the categorical dichotomies that are commonplace both to the history of rhetoric and to Western philosophy generally—e.g., thought/language, form/content, expression/communication, self/other, invention/interpretation. Most of the long-running warhorses among composition textbooks—those that embody what has come to be called the "current-traditional paradigm"[14]—fall into the first of these categories. And it is easy, I think, to see how they would have emerged quite naturally out of the grammar-reader tradition I outlined earlier. Their epistemological premises are, that is, firmly grounded in a traditional formalistic conception of the relationship between thought and language: that thinking is prior to, and largely precedes content and is the primary pedagogical focus for a course in composition. Though it has arrived rather lately on the scene, one of the most forthright of such textbooks is *Process and Thought in Composition,* even the title of which suggests the epistemic structure I have just described.[15] Let me borrow a few excerpts from the book to illustrate:

> Each of us to a certain extent must follow certain lines of development in our thinking because the mind is organized according to certain principles. (*PTC,* p. 42)
>
> Paradigms, at least the kind that we will be concerned with, represent *patterns of thought* that give your writing a sense of direction and provide you with a formal means of ordering your ideas. (*PTC,* p. 70)

The premises of this approach are quite evident: "Thinking" is a way of knowing inscribed within a finite and specifiable set of formal mental processes whose products are "ideas:"

> Every time you analyse, classify, exemplify, enumerate, compare, contrast, or discern cause and effect relationships, you are inventing ideas. (*PTC,* p. 42)

Only after this process is completed does, or can, one write. Thus, a radical form-content distinction is central to the system:

> The concept of structure is our model of understanding and it is not inaccurate to separate the idea of structure from the concept of content. (*CTR,* p. 9)

And this distinction is not merely a useful one, but a prerequisite:

> the structural properties which underlie our mental operations must be genetically inherited. In generating discourse, the individual uses this underlying, abstract

> structure as a base. Then he supports this structure by filling in the details from the universe of discourse around him. (*CTR,* p. 26)

The use of the narrative indicator "then" clearly separates thinking from writing not only modally but temporally. The production of discourse involves filling in the innate structures of thought with details that accrue from elsewhere. Writing is thereby defined as the formulaic elaboration of a chosen (or assigned) pattern that preconstitutes the text that can be produced. "Invention" is largely a pre-linguistic generation of "ideas"; "Interpretation" is largely a process of "reading" the "universe of discourse" around (the writer) to accrete flesh for the prior form.

The reaction against this formalist agenda for teaching writing—beginning during the 1960's—was both direct and extreme, away from the modes and models and toward quasi-romantic conceptions of imagination and personal experience. Authenticity, expression, voice, and particularly "self" are the passwords into this arena. Once again, let me look briefly at a representative example, *Writing in Reality,*[16] whose argument begins with a direct assault on formalism:

> a student who has received exclusive training in so-called forms may, ironically, be limited in the ability to write those forms successfully. . . . (*WR,* p. 8)

and then seeks to supplant it with an alternative, the "experiential approach":

> This method takes as its central premise that all good writing reflects a synthesis of experience; in other words, that we write best about what we know. . . . Further, at least as we practice it, this method holds to the philosophy that the basic skills and organizational structures of writing can be learned as one puts experience into words. It is the structure of experience, not rules of grammar or rhetoric, that shape (sic) words on a page. (*ITW,* p. 134)

In effect, pre-constituted, pre-verbal "experience" replaces ideational "forms" as the substance that one "puts into words." It is the personal, psychic self—not the genetic structure of the brain or the conventional patterns for thinking—that stands at the center of discourse in this universe, supplying the "structure" for "words on a page." The writer need simply "read" the already composed text of "experience" and then render it into language. The form-content distinction remains, though it has assumed a different guise.

These self-based theories of composition excited, during the 1970's, equally extreme opposition, particularly from the "new rhetorics" (not to be confused with Richards's "new Rhetoric"),[17] which conceive of discourse primarily as a message designed in terms of,

and focused toward, an "audience." These rhetorics are allied around a commitment to "reader-based" discourse, process models of composing, heuristic procedures for invention and a general antagonism toward vitalistic or "lookey-feely-smelly" approaches to the teaching of writing.[18]

One of the most aggressive and systematic expressions of such a "process model" of composing is *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing.*[19] This approach emerges from an alliance among traditional rhetoric, the research methods of the most positivistic versions of cognitive psychology, and developments in the production of "artificial intelligence" via computers and robotics. Its primary thesis is that writing is motivated by the perception of "problems" which, by linguistic intervention—either overt or covert persuasion—can be "solved." This problem/solution paradigm is introduced with the metaphor of writing as a goal-directed behavior, a way of getting "from A to B." The implied assumption is that the writer can and should know with some confidence, prior to the act of composition, perhaps even prior to language, though that is not entirely clear, both where he/she wants to begin and where he/she needs to end in order for the "problem" to be "solved." Thus, though the path may vary, the teleological nature of the task is prescribed and the medium of language has value principally as the pathway between intention and effect, both of which can be distinguished from the process of invention that "composing" entails. As the text explains:

> To sum up, then, although different kinds of analytic writing have different formal features, they share two things. They are designed with a reader in mind and they have an underlying hierarchical organization that gives the reader (1) a top-level organizing idea and (2) a logical presentation of the idea's subparts. A good piece of expository writing will let the reader see the tree (the underlying hierarchy of ideas) that lies behind the words.[20]

There is, then, little difference, on the *structural* level, between this approach to the teaching of writing and the version of formalism I described earlier. Form and content, thought and language, reading and writing, invention and interpretation, remain distinct and incommensurable properties and activities.[21]

The most recent developments in composition theory do, I believe, offer for the first time a genuine alternative to this chronic oscillation between neo-classical and neo-romantic approaches to the teaching of writing—both of which, in the end, are captivated by hierarchical conceptions of the relationship between thought/experience and language—offer, in fact, the prospect of re-integrating, perhaps under the more general rubric of "criticism," the two competing ambitions of studies in English: invention and interpretation, or, more simply, writing and reading. I classify the research/textbooks that represent this trend under the general heading of "method-based"

approaches to the production of discourse.

As Ann Berthoff explains it in *Forming, Thinking, Writing:*

> A method of composing is a critical method, a way of getting thinking started and keeping it going . . . . [Such a] method takes advantage of the fact that when you do anything, the *what* and the *how* depend on one another.[22]

This approach both posits and enacts a dialectical rather than a hierarchical relationship between the various contraries I have mentioned. Between, for example, thought and langauge: "how you construe is how you construct . . . . ideas are conceived by language; language is generated by thought" (*FTW,* pp. 46-47). And via this conception of thinking, between invention and interpretation: "When we think, we compose . . . [w]hen we read, we re-compose . . . [and] writing involves you in thinking about thinking and the making of meanings by means of language" (*FTW,* pp. 10-11).

This textbook and a gradually widening stream of articles and books are beginning to change the face, and the prospects, of disciplinary work in composition, creating, finally, the possibility for the "field" to "become," to answer I. A. Richards's imperative to "take charge of the criticism of its own assumptions and not accept them, more than it can help, ready-made from other studies . . . . [to] undertake its own inquiry into the modes of meaning" (*PR,* p. 23).

To illustrate some of the implications of this transition in composition theory, this move toward a merger of reading with writing, invention with interpretation, and most particularly toward a way of talking about, and teaching, at the most basic levels, scribal literacy as a dialogical or dialectical activity, let me counterpose two contrary conceptions of written texts and the corollary processes of composition that both writer and reader must/should deploy in relation to them. I begin, not surprisingly, with Plato's Socrates talking with Phaedrus, hoping to persuade him of the priority of oral over written discourse, of the relative insignificance of scribal literacy to the acquisition of knowledge/truth, a passage that represents one of the constitutive moments in the history of Western Rhetoric:

> *Socr.* Writing, you know, Phaedrus, has this strange quality about it, which makes it really like painting: the painter's products stand before us quite as though they were alive; but if you question them, they maintain a solemn silence. So, too, with written words: you might think they spoke as though they made sense, but if you ask them anything about what they are saying, if you wish an explanation, they go on telling you the same thing, over and over forever. Once a thing is put in writing, it rolls about all over the place, falling into the hands of those who have no concern with it just as easily as under the notice of those who comprehend; it has no notion of whom to address or whom to avoid. And when it is ill-treated or abused as illegitimate, it always needs its father to help it, being quite unable to protect or help itself.[23]

For Socrates then written discourse is tainted by illegitimacy; for without its vocal parent to "protect or help" it, a written text, afflicted by its own fixity, inertness, muteness, by the absence of a "voice" in the most literal sense of that word, can perform, at best, little more than a mnemonic function in the learning process. Both writing and reading are thereby rendered lifeless and dull, mere matters of record-keeping, suitable perhaps for imposing the illusion of order on the day to day business of government and commerce, perhaps even for archiving the skeletons of cultural memory for future reference, but ill-suited to more vital and consequential matters of the mind, the soul. Despite the fact that Aristotle reasserts rhetoric as "the counterpart of Dialectic," he does little to recall writing from its Socratic exile. He simply creates for himself a ground for explaining how best one can compose memor(iz)able arguments for performing the day to day business of government and commerce. This pragmatic/mnemonic identity of written discourse survives today, for example, in the conception of reading as a transfer of content from the text to the memory of the reader, sustained in the academy by methods of testing that reward nothing more than a student's capacity to memorize what he/she has consumed from textbooks and lectures-delivered-as-if-they-were-texts; it survives on a much grander scale in the very langauge of our current computer-managed "information explosion," and our consequent notion that "information" can be parceled into self-contained, self-activating packets to be transferred to the right place at the right time to solve our "problems."

This rigidly formalist conception of scribal composition has, of course, had its critics for centuries now, a renegade here and there in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a more concerted thrust in the nineteenth century; but it has not been until lately that the dialectic has become functionally scribal in academic practice. Once again, a single excerpt will have to suffice synechdochically to illustrate the point. This time I quote from H. G. Gadamer:

> The understanding of a text has not begun at all as long as the text remains mute. But a text can begin to speak. . . . When it does begin to speak, however, it does not simply speak its word, always the same, in lifeless rigidity, but gives ever new answers to the person who questions it and poses ever new questions to him who answers it.[24]

The contrast with, the response to, Socrates is direct and forceful here. The reader's function is no longer simply to reconstitute the absent voice of the author in order to re-memorize it—the fatal flaw of textuality even from Socrates' point of view—but to engage in an intense, variable,

ongoing dialogue with the very text itself, to vitalize it, constitute it in a new form in its present place. The activity of making is thereby assigned to reader as well as writer, the distinctions between the two begin to blur, one threatens to interact with, to merge with, the other, intention conflates with response; in short, reading and writing become as vital and problematical as dialogue. There are, of course, in this passage some obvious remnants of the very literal "humanism" that both compels and emerges from Socrates' valorization of dialogue—the oral metaphors through which the act of engagement with a text is conceived and defined, the general personification of textuality throughout the passage. These lend themselves to further and more radical deconstruction. But the move that grants that readerly entitlement to question and re-make has already been made. Reading has already become a mode of writing, and vice versa.

Coincident with this nascent self-understanding, and self-criticism, of our conceptions of literacy is what amounts in potential to the most radical innovation in curriculum reform that the academy has seen in, easily, twenty years. For this movement intends to seed, to transfuse, select portions of the general curriculum with writing-based courses, courses designed either to supplement or to supplant more "contentless" courses in freshman composition. I am talking, of course, about Writing Across the Curriculum.

Let me begin the final portion of my analysis with a simple, if arguable, proposition: that *writing*—despite the vast enterprise into which composition has grown, despite the acres of print that have been devoted to the "crisis of literacy"—has never held a central place, played a leading role, in either the curriculum or the pedagogy of the modern American university, that it has rarely, if at all, served even a tangential function in the academic enterprise. The fact that it has been incorporated, until recently, only periodically into our programs, via the tedious rhythm of the implementation and abandonment of a distribution or "skills" requirement, and then primarily through the separate category of "freshman composition," is the most telling evidence of that. The very growth, over the last twenty-five years, of composition as a "field," a specialization, a discipline in its own right, is merely a reflection of that same trend to segregate writing from the rest of the curriculum. Perhaps the most pernicious effect of this gradual enclosure of writing, and writing instruction, in the mantle of disciplinary prestige has been the tendency elsewhere in the university to see it as the exclusive province, or problem, of English teachers, as preparatory to, and therefore separable from, any other sort of disciplinary inquiry, at best a developed competence, at worst a skill, subject to remediation, that students should bring fully refined with them into their more advanced "content" courses. This systemic definition of writing as a pre-disciplinary, perhaps even pre-academic, instrumentality has fostered almost all of the developments/problems I have tried thus far to outline. And it is only, I think, through a genuine renegotiation of that relationship—via a fundamental re-conception of our functional definitions of "meaning," of "method," of "research," of "reading," of "writing"—that the form-content distinction at its roots

can be overcome, in favor of a model that accords to each discipline the primary control of, and responsibility for, the "criticism of its own assumptions," the "inquiry into (its own) modes of meaning," in favor of a model that disperses throughout the curriculum, in structural ways rather than as superficial nods and gestures, the critical instruments that allow us to make all of the various kinds of meaning of which we are capable.

In order to reconstitute the curriculum with writing and critical thinking at its center we must, then, be willing to take at least one dramatic initial step, which is to imagine the discourses of our various "disciplines" from the inside, in terms of the modes of inquiry, the methods of composition, the epistemological assumptions and structures, that produce and enact those discourses rather than from the outside, in terms of the formal vehicles of their various "contents" and formats, the publically visible edifices that tradition has erected to define and limit their various interior spaces. Such a step would go a long way toward breaking down the barriers that our present, rigidly categorical, curriculum has constructed as the principal means by which it defines its "fields," teaches its "subjects." The movement toward "writing across the curriculum" provides an occasion for such a step. And it seems doubly ironic to me that at the very historical moment that composition is constituting itself as a legitimate "field," it should be helping to sow the seeds, all over the curriculum, of its own eventual demise.

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NOTES

1 I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 3, hereafter cited in the text as *PR*.

2 Richards himself contributed his own version of a sender-receiver "circuit" in *Speculative Instruments* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1955). As Richards explores the "problem" of translation/communication in Chapter II, his schematic becomes more and more complicated in its "wiring." Visible here is the tension I discuss later between the entropic demands of Richards's version of meaning/reading and the simultaneous desire on his part for a positivistic explanation of it. The theme of "communication" has long been affiliated with the teaching of composition. In "Journals in Composition Studies," *College English*, 46 (1984), 348-65, hereafter cited as "JCS", Robert Conners notes that in 1949 a "group of enthusiasts met in Chicago and formed a special-interest group that wished to concentrate on 'communications' courses and the teaching of written expression" (p. 349). The journal they established, *College Composition and Communication*, has generally had a more "scientific," research-based bent that its older counter-part, *College English*.

3 The distinction between these contrary ambitions in Richards's project is encapsulated in Lecture II: ". . . a revived Rhetoric, or study of verbal understanding and misunderstanding, must itself undertake its own inquiry into the modes of meaning—not only, as with the old Rhetoric, on a macroscopic scale, discussing the effects of different disposals of large parts of a discourse—but also on a microscopic scale by using theorums about the structure of the fundamental conjectural units of meaning and the conditions through which they, and their

interconnections, arise" (*PR*, pp. 23-24). Via this latter mode, Richards's method makes itself amenable most obviously to the more quantitative techniques of modern linguistics, but also, and less obviously, to the sorts of poetic analysis, on a "microscopic" level, that were to become the mainstay of modernist poetics and its consequent critical theories. Thus the curious empirico-aesthetic blend of his own mode of inquiry. The more quantitative side of this equation is visible today perhaps most clearly in a text like Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970). Pike's "tagmemic" linguistics serves here as the undergirding for the development of a heuristic "rhetoric," via Young, with a touch of cultural anthropology, via Becker. This text, among others, has served to advance the "science" of "discourse analysis" that seeks, in its own way, to study "units of meaning and the conditions through which they, and their interconnections, arise."

4 It is worth noting here that the reference is to "reading" rather than, as one might expect, to "writing." I will talk in more detail later in the essay about recent inclinations in composition theory to affiliate, via a merger of theories of "invention" with theories of "interpretation," reading with writing. That development could well be said to be nascent here in Richards's conception of the nature of "interpretation." See also in this regard Richards's *Practical Criticism* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1929) and *How to Read a Page* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1942).

5 Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. W. D. Woodhead, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New York: Bollingen Foundation, distributed by Random House, 1961), p. 233, 449-d, hereafter cited as *CDP*.

6 The metaphor here is, of course, the translator's. The same Greek expression (*περί τι τῶν ὄντων*) is translated a few lines earlier as "scope." One could as well elaborate my argument via this optical metaphor: Is, for instance, one's "scope" of vision defined by what is present to/in it, the things it encompasses, or by its contentless range and depth, by which it can encompass whatever it "looks at"? The Greek expression is both vaguer and more ontological in nature, raising a question about, in effect, the aspects of "being" that constitutes the "province" of rhetoric. A similar conundrum exists here: i.e., does one define "being" in terms of the ground for the possibility of "things" or in terms of the immanent presences that comprise "it"? As all of this applies to rhetoric, Socrates seems to oppose transferable techniques, "knacks," to an intrinsic "subject matter," which he feels is absent from sophistic rhetorics.

7 This manner of understanding/implementing the Socratic "method" is nicely characterized in S. T. Coleridge's "Essays on Method" from *The Friend*, where he argues, alluding to Plato, for a conception of inquiry that traces a "path" that varies in accordance with, in response to, in attendance upon, its subject. This content/subject/context-dependence is, I believe, one of the characteristic features of Socrates' method, one of the motives for his insistence that sophistic rhetorics remain alienated from wisdom/virtue/truth. Thus his various arguments on behalf of the dialectic (over rhetoric), of "conversation" (over "exhibition") and, in *Phaedrus*, of oral discourse (over written texts).

8 Socrates engages a series of interlocutors in this dialogue—Gorgias himself, Polus, Gorgias's pupil, and Callicles, who is housing Gorgias. All of them are trapped in contradiction by Socrates. Gorgias seems to be unruffled by this; the latter two jump to his defense, shifting the argument, whenever possible, to the tricks and ploys of Socrates' method of questioning rather than attacking the substance of his "position" on the "subject" of the conversation. They are, in effect, practical rhetoricians, adept at critiquing the manner in which the debate is proceeding, often at the expense of the matter of the argument. This is, in a sense, a virtual enactment of Gorgias's definition of rhetoric as a "competitive" "craft": "Ah, if only you knew all, Socrates, and realized that rhetoric includes practically all other faculties under her control . . . for there is no subject on which a rhetorician would not speak more persuasively than any other craftsman, before a crowd. Such then is the scope and character of rhetoric, but it should be used, Socrates, like every other competitive art" (*CDP*, pp. 230-40, 456 a-c). It is largely via his earlier claim that rhetoric is "concerned with right and wrong" (*CDP*, p. 237, 454 b) that Socrates traps him in contradiction, and also that his latter claim loses the authority that Aristotle later is able to sustain for essentially the same position.

9 This master/servant aspect of the field's identity is best illustrated today by, on the one hand, the "remedial" or "service" role that composition plays in relation to the rest of the curriculum—a kind of preparation for, or indoctrination into, the discourse of the academy—and, on the other, the simultaneous tendency of Writing Across the Curriculum programs to seek to re-align the pedagogical imperatives/methods of the "subject-matter" fields at the upper-division level.

10 Aristotle, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, trans. Lane Cooper (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1932) pp. 7-8, section 1.2.

11 As I noted above (n. 4) there are many respects in which *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* is as much a philosophy of reading as a philosophy of composition. Richards talks specifically about "the reader" for example on page 125. This, and his earlier discussion of ambiguity and its relevance to "Poetry and Religion" (p. 40), are, of course, worked out in much more elaborate detail in his *Practical Criticism*.

12 Robert Conners (above, n. 2) suggests also that the "field" has only recently established itself: "Like it or not, however, we are launched. Composition studies is a genuine discipline, no longer merely a hobby, or avocation, or punishment, and through our scholarly journals we can direct this fledgling discipline in a number of directions" ("JCS," p. 364). He argues earlier that "in composition studies, journals have come in the past twenty years to be *the* most powerful institutions; they seem to have at this time surpassed their predecessors and historical rivals, textbooks, for the position of primary influence" ("JCS," p. 353). This may well be the case, since the opportunity to publish a textbook is these days often a function of status *within* the institutional framework of the discipline. But textbooks have long been, and will continue to be, instruments of power almost unparalleled in the other disciplines. And those textbooks, e.g., McCrimmon's *Writing With a Purpose*, which are regularly revised to accommodate recent trends in scholarship, can reach an immense "audience" over a period of years (in this case, nearly thirty-five).

13 See Paul Kameen, "Rewarding the Rhetoric of Composition," *Pre/Text*, 9 (Spring-Fall 1980), 73-93. Here, and in what follows, I am relying heavily on this prior analysis of textbooks, which I flesh out in more detail in that article. I have added category (4) here to account for a more recent thrust in the development of composition theory. The other categories, and the primary illustrative examples, with a few exceptions, remain the same.

14 See Richard E. Young, "Paradigms and Problems: Needed Research in Rhetorical Invention," *Research on Composing: Points of Departure*, ed. Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1978) pp. 29-48; and James A. Berlin and Robert R. Inkster, "Current-Traditional Rhetoric: Paradigm and Practice," *Freshman English News*, 8 (Winter 1980), for a complete discussion of the definition and significance of this term.

15 Frank J. D'Angelo, *Process and Thought in Compositon* (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop, 1975), hereafter cited *PTC*. See also D'Angelo, *A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric* (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop, 1975) hereafter cited in the body of the essay as *CTR*. I have tried in this and subsequent cases to select my examplars for each approach on the basis of a textbook accompanied by a theoretical statement of the author's conception of the "philosophical" context of his/her position. These companion texts (either books or a series of significant articles) represent the author's "theory" of composition to *teachers* rather than students of composition.

16 James E. Miller and Stephen N. Judy, *Writing in Reality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); hereafter cited *WR*. See also, Stephen N. Judy and Susan J. Judy, *An Introduction to the Teaching of Writing* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1981), hereafer cited in the body of the essay as *ITW*.

17 Though the term "new rhetoric" has assumed a generic status over the last decade or so, refering to almost any of the various "process-oriented" approaches to teaching writing, it seems to have originated with Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric* (1958; rpt. Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1969). The recent preoccupation with "audience," though its roots go all the way back to Aristotle, has also been excited/focused by this text, a significant portion of which is devoted to a delineation of the three kinds of audience-awareness that are relevant to acts of composition.

18 W. Ross Winterowd, ed., *Contemporary Rhetoric: A Conceptual Background with Readings* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. 39.

19 Linda Flower, *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981). See also Linda Flower and John R. Hayes, "Problem-Solving Strategies and the Writing Process," *College English,* 33 (December 1977), 449-61; and "The Cognition of Discovery: Defining a Rhetorical Problem," *College Composition and Communication,* 31 (February 1980), 21-32. See also Allen Newell and Herbet A. Simon, *Human Problem Solving* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

20 Flower, *Problem-Solving Strategies,* pp. 11-12.

21 Clinton S. Burhans, Jr., in "The Teaching of Writing and the Knowledge Gap," *College English,* 45 (1983), 639-656, argues, to the contrary, that "the 'Model Course Sequence' suggested by Carnegie-Mellon for its PhD in English . . . is a new kind of English, one which balances reading and writing with language and literature" (p.655). This program was structured around the work of Flower-Hayes and Richard Young. Burhans draws this conclusion after listing the various courses that comprise this "Model Course Sequence"; however, only two of the seventeen courses plus "electives" in that sequence have anything whatever to do with "reading" (Process of Reading) or literature (Approaches to Literature). For this, and for a variety of other reasons that are beyond the scope of this essay, though they warrant a critique, Burhans' conclusion seems not only unjustified, but erroneous. For a much richer presentation of a theoretical and methodological correlation between reading and writing, see Mariolina Salvatori, "Reading and Writing a Text: Correlations between Reading and Writing Patterns," which immediately follows Burhans's article in the same issue.

22 Ann E. Berthoff, *Forming, Thinking, Writing: The Composing Imagination* (Rochelle Park, N.J.: Hayden Book Co., 1978), p. 90, hereafter cited as *FTW*. See also *The Making of Meaning: Metaphors, Models and Maxims for Writing Teachers* (Upper Montclair, N.J.: Boynton Cook, 1981).

23 Plato, *Phaedrus,* trans. W.C. Helmbold and W.G. Rabinowitz (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), pp. 69-70. It is important I think to differentiate here between Plato, the author of the dialogue, and his main character, Socrates. It seems inconceivable to me that Plato would not be fully aware of the almost comical irony of presenting this case against written texts in the form of a written text. Plato himself may well be using the dialogue as a kind of fictional foil to call into immediate question the very proposition that he has Socrates positing for Phaedrus. In fact, the format of the Platonic dialogue itself—a textual rendition of a human conversation—poses a conundrum that is insoluable via the distinctions Socrates is here making between composed and dialogical arguments.

24 Hans-George Gadamer, *Philosohical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1976), p. 57. This observation emerges from the context of a discussion of, among other things, "theological insight" (p. 54). It is, though, generalized, by analogy with Gadamer's exploration of the gamelike qualities of oral discourse, to texts of all sorts. Ann Berthoff's conception of reading, and its relation to both dialogue and writing, is methodologically comparable to Gadamer's, though she roots her argument in (or, one might say in a very positive way, out of) her own readings of a variety of Modernist philosophers and rhetoricians. See also, for a further complication of my observations about Socrates, Gadamer's own *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1975) pp. 325-41, wherein he considers the nature and function of the question in light of "Plato's account of Socrates" in the dialogues.